

Figuring Lateness in Modern German Culture

Karen Leeder

Time . . . to die
—*Blade Runner*

An interest in “late style” as a category has long been important in musicology and art history. The last decade or so has seen the growing significance of this approach in cultural and literary studies, especially in light of Edward W. Said’s influential volume *On Late Style* (2006), which brought the ideas into general circulation. This interest both reflects and feeds into the growth of a new discipline that might be termed “humanistic (or cultural) gerontology” and operates at the intersection of humanities, medical science, and social sciences.¹ In the United States the new discipline has led the way in analyzing the implication of aging across a broad interdisciplinary spectrum, with numerous publications on aging and creativity, old-age style, “late style,” and the importance for culture and philosophy of the notion of late work.

This field has a special resonance in Europe where work is also beginning. If the interest in the United States is arguably led by the aging academy

1. Edward W. Said, *On Late Style* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006). Hereafter cited as *OLS*. See also Robert Butler, “The Life Review: An Interpretation of Reminiscence in the Aged,” *Psychiatry* 26 (1963): 65–76; Marion Perlmutter, ed., *Late Life Potential* (Washington, DC: Gerontological Society of America, 1990); Martin S. Lindauer, *Aging, Creativity, and Art: A Positive Perspective on Late-Life Development* (New York: Kluwer, 2003); Stephen Katz, *Cultural Aging: Life Course, Lifestyle, and Senior Worlds* (Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 2005); David W. Galenson, *Old Masters and Young Geniuses: The Two Life Cycles of Artistic Creativity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

exploring its own life issues, in Europe the issues speak to an acute global aging crisis and the increasing dominance of aging populations. Modern Germany is an ideal field in which to explore some of these ideas, not only because of its pressing population statistics and its history, which makes it predisposed to think of itself in terms of lateness, but also because it boasts a long philosophical engagement with ideas of lateness, which extends to the present day. More significantly, however, modern German culture appears remarkably receptive to interpretation in this vein.² However: lateness is more than old age or late style. The epigraph to this introduction comes from Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982), and more particularly from what is widely acknowledged as one of the great valedictory soliloquies in modern cinematic culture.³ When the off-world replicant Roy Batty (played by Rutger Hauer), who has outlived his preprogrammed life span, speaks of his unique experiences being lost on his extinction—"All those moments will be lost in time, like tears in rain. Time to die"—he speaks at the threshold of death (lateness) of a being that has never truly been alive. But he also articulates a position of belatedness in a much fuller sense. For beyond the implication of senescence (Batty is not of course conventionally old) with which it has been linked, lateness conjures up a much wider spectrum of anxieties: obsolescence, redundancy, anachronism, the sense of always coming after a legitimizing model, but also losing touch with an originating authority. It is not for nothing that Joseph K. in Franz Kafka's *Trial* finds himself turning up at a random door, but too late for the mysterious proceedings against him, without ever having known the time of his appointment or even that he was expected in that place.

In this sense, lateness can be understood as a symptom of many of the key anxieties of the age: from a loss of religious and ontological certainty to the pressure of past generations memorably summed up in Harold Bloom's "anxiety of influence." But lateness can also be understood as a response to the prevailing climate. Batty's lateness, for example, is a form of resistance, a rebellion, against the culture of genetic reproduction, in which his "life" has no value. *Blade Runner* is in many ways prescient of the debates triggered by the term *lateness* today. What is evident, however, is that to understand lateness aright, it has to be viewed in its full sense and embedded within the context of philosophies of time and history.

2. See, e.g., three recent additions: Miriam Seidler, *Figurenmodelle des Alters in der deutschsprachigen Gegenwartsliteratur* (Tübingen: Narr, 2010); Sandro Zanetti, *Avantgardismus der Greise? Spätwerke und ihre Poetik* (Munich: Fink, 2012); Henriette Herwig, ed., *Merkwürdige Alte: Zu einer literarischen und bildlichen Kultur des Alter(n)s* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2014).

3. Mark Rowlands, *The Philosopher at the End of the Universe: Philosophy Explained through Science Fiction Films* (London: Random House, 2003), 234–35.

Lateness and Creativity

If lateness does not form part of the central discussions of time that have been circulating the last few years, it has nevertheless become a catchword of sorts in another arena. “The older authors become, the more a single idea takes hold of them” the thirty-eight-year-old Martin Walser noted in an essay of 1965 (see Taberner’s contribution in this issue). One might be forgiven for thinking that that idea is old age itself. What has become over the last decade a “late work industry” is evident everywhere one cares to look. This has its self-evident causes—as analyzed in Helen Small’s award-winning book *The Long Life* (2007).⁴ In Western culture we are living longer; in Germany the statistics are acute. Official statistics predict that by 2060 every seventh person in Germany will be aged eighty or older and every third person will be over sixty-five, assuming current trends in medicine, low birthrates, and regulated immigration persist. The prospect of a senescent society on this scale has prompted dire predictions of a global crisis from the social sciences—from economics to psychology—and been answered in a vast popular literature that seeks to address ways of not merely aging, but aging well.⁵

In the cultural sphere at least it has been welcomed as a more positive phenomenon with the emergence of the new field of gerontology in the humanities giving rise to manifold studies of aging and creativity from various perspectives.⁶ A focus on “late style” (a curious and problematic amalgam of the German *Spätstil* [late style, understood as historical] and *Altersstil* [individual old-age style] has been particularly prominent, fueled especially by Said’s *On Late Style*, which takes as its premise the relationship between bodily condition and aesthetic style, and which has set the agenda in literary studies in the last few years.

4. Helen Small, *The Long Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

5. Richard A. Posner, *Aging and Old Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), gives an early economic analysis in the Anglo-Saxon context. Stuart Taberner gives an overview of the acute situation in Germany, and the literature on it, in his *Aging and Old-Age Style in Günter Grass, Ruth Klüger, Christa Wolf, and Martin Walser: The Mannerism of a Late Period* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2013), esp. 1–10. The German Center for Gerontology in Berlin has comprehensive holdings on aging in Germany. See Deutsches Zentrum für Altersfragen, www.dza.de/bibliothek.html (accessed May 20, 2014).

6. Amir Cohen-Shalev, *Both Worlds at Once: Art in Old Age* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2002); Anne M. Wyatt-Brown and Janice Rossen, eds., *Aging and Gender in Literature: Studies in Creativity* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993); Kathleen Woodward, *Aging and Its Discontents: Freud and Other Fictions* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); Thomas R. Cole, David D. Van Tessel, and Robert Kastenbaum, eds., *Handbook of the Humanities and Aging* (New York: Springer, 1992); Dean Keith Simonton, *Genius and Creativity: Selected Papers* (Greenwich, CT: Ablex, 1997); David Rosand, “Editor’s Statement: Style and the Aging Artist,” *Art Journal* 46, no. 2 (1987): 91–93; Rudolf Arnheim, “On the Late Style of Life and Art,” *Michigan Quarterly Review* 17, no. 2 (1978): 149–56.

However, the notion of late style is part of a much older and characteristically German discourse that has determined the canonical view of late work in the early twentieth century. That discourse returns frequently to the touchstone of Goethe, on the one hand, and Thomas Mann, on the other, but in fact includes a highly varied tradition of reflection on these issues. It was Johann Joachim Winckelmann's categorization of the arts of antiquity, in his *History of the Art of Antiquity* (1756–62), that cemented a particular way to view historical development resting on metaphors of biological development: a familiar trope of rise, culmination, and decline.⁷ The sense of “corruption or exhaustion” has consequently often been imputed to a period's late style, and for many years late works were, Karen Painter writes, seen in a similar light (*LT*, 1). In contrast, the nineteenth century saw a shift in values as a result of the valorization of selfhood within Romanticism. A particular aura accrued to the late work, suggesting that in it an artist nearing death “might plausibly attain transcendence and communion with the divine spirit, allowing even secular work to be infused with a deep spiritual orientation” (*LT*, 2). Artistic maturity, it was thought, might offer the artist an escape from the distractions of youth and more important from the trappings of the epoch in question, thus allowing his work to issue into a singular inner vision.

If a positive rethinking of late style as a facet of the cultivation of selfhood was largely inspired by Romanticism, it was the era's pervasive historicism that later amplified and sustained this interest. Ideals of brief heroic lives gave way to models of long-sustained labor in artistic or public life. The Romantic apprehension of late style as a form of struggle yielded to a more dialectic appreciation of it as a process of farewell to the world. This interpretation presupposed, once again, that the artist had mastered aesthetic rules and structures and that, after a period of life review, he or she might be able to make a decisive step to transcend them, the battle with convention having been won. Jacob Grimm, in his 1860 lecture in defense of old age, “On Old Age,” saw precisely in the reflective peace of old age an opportunity to cast back beyond the chatter of the day and recognize a more essential truth.⁸

By the end of the nineteenth century, as Painter points out, it was common for artists to reflect self-consciously on endings, not merely of their own

7. Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *History of the Art of Antiquity*, trans. Harry Francis Mallgrave (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2006), 20–29. I draw here on Karen Painter, *Late Thoughts: Reflections on Artists and Composers at Work*, ed. Karen Painter and Thomas Crow (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2006), 1–11. Hereafter cited as *LT*.

8. Jacob Grimm, “Rede über das Alter,” in *Auswahl aus den kleineren Schriften* (Berlin: Dümmler, 1875), 171.

creative struggle, but of the genres in which they worked (*LT*, 3). This might often take the form of irony or excess in ways productively taken up by Said over a century later.⁹ Nevertheless, by the twentieth century ideas of old-age style were still dominated by an understanding of art as the struggle of great men toward transcendence.¹⁰ Erich Neumann, for example, in his “Art and Time” of 1954, explains that a principal function of all art is to “set in motion the archetypal reality of the transpersonal within the individual . . . to raise him above time and epoch—to lead him to the timeless radiant dynamic that is at the heart of the world.” This peculiar achievement he sees exemplified especially in certain artists in old age (Rembrandt, Titian, Beethoven, Shakespeare, Goethe) who have accomplished a strange and lonely “transfiguration, a breakthrough into the realm of essence,” which turns its back on its own age in favor of a mystical realm beyond any contingent “time-bound form.”¹¹

Neumann’s contemporary Hermann Broch offers an understanding in some ways very close to that of Neumann, though not inflected by psychoanalytic thinking to the same degree. His essay “The Style of the Mythical Age” emphasizes the “sharp stylistic break,” a caesura or rupture in mode of expression in the work of great artists (geniuses) in advanced years, which issues into a new and unforeseen creativity. In the paragraph most often quoted, he sets out how old-age work can reach

a new level of expression such as the old Titian’s discovery of the all-penetrating light which dissolves the human flesh and the human soul to a higher unity; or such as the finding by Rembrandt and Goya, both at the height of their manhood, of the metaphysical surface which underlies the visible in man and thing, and which nevertheless can be painted; or such as *The Art of the Fugue* which Bach in his old age dictated without having a concrete instrument in mind, because what he had to express was either beneath or beyond the audible surface of music; or such as the last quartets of Beethoven, in which he—only then in his fifties but already near to death—found the

9. See Said, “Return to the Eighteenth Century,” especially on Strauss, or “*Così fan tutte* at the Limits,” in *OLS*, 25–47, 48–90.

10. Hermann Broch, “Mythos und Altersstil,” in *Schriften zur Literatur*, vol. 2 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1973), 212–33; Gottfried Benn, “Altern als Problem für Künstler,” in *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Gerhard Schuster and Holger Hof, 7 vols. (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1986–2003), 6:123–50; Erich Neumann, *Kunst und schöpferisches Unbewusstes* (1954; repr. Einsiedeln: Daimon, 2006), 77–140; Ernst Bloch, *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*, vol. 1 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1959), 37–44. Benn’s *Sämtliche Werke* are hereafter cited as *SW*. See also Albert Erich Brinckmann’s influential *Spätwerke grosser Meister* (Frankfurt am Main: DVA, 1925), to which some of these (e.g., Benn) were responding.

11. Erich Neumann, “Art and Time,” in *Art and the Creative Unconscious: Four Essays*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1959), 106, 103, 104.

way from earthly music to the music of the infinite; or such as Goethe's last writings, the final scenes of *Faust* for instance, where the language discloses its own mysteries and, therefore, those of all existence.¹²

In the "music of the infinite," or the "mysteries . . . of all existence," we see the espousal of iterations of what Broch more broadly calls "abstractism," an aesthetic transfiguration, which has moved beyond the contours and the grammar of the epoch.

Certainly, there were other quite different voices from those of Broch and Neumann. Gottfried Benn, for example, in letters, poems, and above all his lecture "Artists and Old Age," first given on March 7, 1954, in Stuttgart, linked the coming of old age with decrepitude and decline, elegy, and the fear of (self-) epigonism.¹³ This mood is inspired also by an urgent reckoning with the end of the National Socialist state and especially the role he played in it, along with his subsequent alienation within postwar society. But, significantly, he also makes the connection between personal and epochal belatedness, and the forging of an aesthetic very far from serene, seeing the late phase of the moment as "Expressionist style, Phase II," or "Post-Classical humanity, Phase II" (SW, 5:170). Yet Benn was always already late, in a way, something he himself hints at when he sees his generation as the inevitable belated product of the cataclysm of World War I, a world predestined for decline, and "the last art of Europe."¹⁴

Benn's tack notwithstanding, the idea of a decisive break in old age of a mature and exceptional artist with his previous style in favor of a mode more serene, often more autobiographically inflected, sometimes primitive or child-like, but in any case effortlessly transcendent and sublime, provided a dominant narrative that conditions responses to old-age creativity to this day. The privileged place that late work occupies in the critical imagination rests not only on its biographical force, however, but also on a more complex relationship between the artist and his or her era. Moreover, as suggested by Benn, sublimity is not the only form of available senescence. This is particularly evident in Theodor W. Adorno's thinking on the subject. Adorno's fragmentary and challenging work on the idea of late style is the touchstone of almost all later commentators, though many come to altogether different conclusions.

12. Hermann Broch, "The Style of the Mythical Age," introductory essay to Rachel Bepsaloff, *On the Iliad*, trans. Mary McCarthy (New York: Pantheon, 1947), 11–12.

13. Gottfried Benn, "Artists and Old Age," trans. Ernest Kaiser and Eithne Wilkins, in *Primal Vision: Selected Writings of Gottfried Benn*, ed. E. B. Ashton (London: Boyars, 1976), 183–208.

14. Gottfried Benn, "Expressionismus," in SW, 4:78, 87. I discuss these ideas in Karen Leeder, "'Das Gen des Todes': Altersstil, Spätstil und Spätsein bei Gottfried Benn," in *Benn Forum: Beiträge zur literarischen Moderne* 3 (2012–13): 193–211.

As early as the 1930s Adorno took up the concept of *Spätstil*, approaching it from an aesthetics grounded in Marxist thought rather than individual biography.¹⁵ In his influential writings on late Beethoven, for example, he suggests that the key to late works lies not in any psychological or organic life trajectory of the artist or composer but in the relation of art to its historical context. He consistently argues that music, for example, should portray “in the clearest possible lines the contradictions and flaws which cut through present-day society.”¹⁶ Beethoven, he claims, used the conventions of the bourgeois era in his late works but in doing so could express a more fundamental negation of its values. Adorno points, for example, to Beethoven’s refusal to “reconcile into a single image what is not reconciled.”¹⁷ Late style was thus no longer interpreted merely as the discordance of the artist with his era; it had become instead a product of the era’s own inner contradictions, and its governing aesthetic was now one of fragmentation and dissonance.¹⁸

Sixty years later, and explicitly following Adorno, Said, in his own late, indeed posthumous, work *On Late Style*, also rejected the notion that reconciliation and serenity were hallmarks of late works.¹⁹ Asking how bodily condition affects aesthetic style and how both interact with the historical moment, this brief though highly influential work explored not only the work produced by mature artists but also their relationship with their own times. With reference to various writers and musicians, but centrally Adorno and Beethoven, Said highlighted the fundamental “untimeliness” of late works, which he describes in various ways: following Adorno, as a kind of exile; an irascible gesture of leave-taking; or a nostalgic awareness nevertheless preternaturally aware of the present. Late style is thus a conflicted temporal category, which is colored by figures of exile and anachronism and “caught up in the double temporality of ‘ending *and* surviving together’” (*OLS*, 24, 174). Or, as Said pithily

15. See Theodor W. Adorno, “Late Style in Beethoven” (1937), “On the Social Situation of Music” (1957), and “Alienated Masterpiece: The *Missa Solemnis*” (1959), in *Essays on Music*, by Theodor W. Adorno, ed. Richard Leppert, trans. Susan H. Gillespie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 564–68, 391–436, 569–83.

16. Adorno, “On the Social Situation of Music,” 391.

17. Adorno, “Alienated Masterpiece,” 580.

18. Adorno, “Late Style in Beethoven,” 564.

19. To be fair, this understanding of age has an alternative tradition best exemplified by Kenneth Clark, *The Artist Grows Old: The Rede Lecture, 1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972). See also Leon Edel, “Portrait of the Artist as an Old Man,” in *Aging, Death, and the Completion of Being*, ed. David D. Van Tassel (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1979), 193–214; Amir Cohen-Shalev, “Old-Age Style: Developmental Changes in Creative Production from a Life-Span Perspective,” *Journal of Aging Studies* 3, no. 1 (1989): 33; or Kathleen Woodward, *At Last, the Real Distinguished Thing: The Late Poems of Eliot, Pound, Stevens, and Williams* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1980).

puts it, “Late style is *in*, but oddly apart *from*, the present” (24). Death in the works is represented in a refracted mode, as allegory, anachronism, anomaly, or irony. Instead of harmony and resolution, the privileged style of artistic lateness is, according to Said, “intransigence, difficulty, and unresolved contradiction” (7). This loss of totality is what, he argues, renders late works, in Adorno’s terms, “catastrophic” (12–13). As Said summarizes: “This is the prerogative of late style: it has the power to render disenchantment and pleasure without resolving the contradiction between them” (148).

Said’s provocative formulation of the problem has been closely followed by several important publications that draw on and simultaneously critique his ideas.²⁰ However, the idea of late style as set out by Adorno or Said is only one facet of discourses of lateness more generally and is in itself a problematic one. Their shared notion of a canon of late, great male geniuses across history reveals transcultural, transhistorical, and gendered assumptions about lateness that demand to be challenged in a number of ways. Also, their very particular notion of a singular late style, while usefully pitched against older monolithic understandings, replaces them with a new one equally open to question. Despite their interest in the relationship between the artist and society, they both invest in the biographical singularity of “genius” to a degree that eclipses that social context. Robert Kastenbaum argues, for example, that “late style is essentially an illusion that has been propagated on a sentimental basis and which ignores the variety of processes and contexts in which creative works are produced late in life.”²¹ Bluntly put: late style is best understood as contingent rather than transcendent. There is, moreover, no singular late style, just innumerable styles espoused by different artists. Like any other aesthetic phenomenon, it is a complex product of the artist’s experiences as a being in a particular time and place, rather than a universal mode or technique that descends on the artist at a certain moment in the aging process.

Moreover, it can be consciously adopted by an artist who is inclined or induced to eschew harmony and to be critical of a particular outmoded or obsolescent status quo (*OLS*, 21). In this light, late style can be seen simply as

20. See esp. Gordon McMullan, *Shakespeare and the Idea of Late Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Lecia Rosenthal, “Between Humanism and Late Style,” in *Edward Said: A Legacy of Emancipation and Representation*, ed. Adel Iskandar and Hakem Rustom (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 473–81; and Gordon McMullan and Sam Smiles, eds., *Late Style and Its Discontents: Essays in Art, Literature, and Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming). McMullan’s *Shakespeare and the Idea of Late Writing* is hereafter cited as *SI*.

21. Program of the Thirty-Eighth Annual Scientific Meeting of the Gerontological Society of America, *Gerontologist* 25, no. 3 (1985): 252. Painter agrees: “The very process of generalization reveals fissures in any theory of late style, with contradictions rather than variation abounding” (*LT*, 7).

one of several possible maneuvers in self-positioning and self-validation that is expressed in Michael Millgate's idea of "testamentary acts."²² Said, too, pursuing his diagnosis of Adorno as an artist willfully askew to his times (as one might also think of Said himself), defines "a moment when the artist who is fully in command of his medium nevertheless abandons communication with the established social order of which he is a part and achieves a contradictory, alienated relationship with it. His late works are a form of exile from his milieu" (*OLS*, 7–8). In other words, a deliberate kind of "anachronism" might provide the purchase with which an artist can counter his or her times and espouse aspirations that to others seem superannuated, untimely, or in danger of being driven out of existence.²³

It follows then that while one might analyze individual artists' late styles, there is little mileage in attempting to define a universal late style that purportedly develops at a certain life stage. In particular, Gordon McMullan's work on Shakespeare reminds us of the potential of such models to deliver a handful of dominant archetypes that eclipse the specificity of the individuals or historical moments concerned. He introduces the useful notion of writing "in the proximity of death" (the subtitle of his 2007 volume) to address the historically determined question of when lateness or old age might begin and condemns what he calls the "myth of synchrony," of a transcendent late style that is the same for all artists at all times (see *SI*, 9). He also highlights the absence of a female discourse of lateness and the problematic gendering of the notion of genius that has dominated explorations of late style up until recently. Finally, he demonstrates that late style, far from any essential attribute or natural phenomenon, should best be seen instead as an artistic construct, but even more a critical construct, in which different times for their own purposes have sought to invest.²⁴

In summary, then, notions of old-age style or late style are only a contentious, if useful, beginning. To figure lateness more generally requires looking

22. Michael Millgate, *Testamentary Acts: Browning, Tennyson, James, Hardy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 1–2.

23. I offer a reading of Bertolt Brecht's late poetry that stresses the strategic importance of lateness, "Lateness and Late Style in Brecht's Last Poetry," in "Brecht and the GDR: Politics, Culture, Posterity," ed. Laura Bradley and Karen Leeder, *Edinburgh German Yearbook* 5 (2011): 45–64, and discuss the power of anachronism as a strategic vantage point with reference to the poet Michael Hamburger in "'Anachronism': Michael Hamburger and the Time and Place of Late Work," in McMullan and Smiles, *Late Style and Its Discontents*.

24. McMullan offers a trenchant articulation of the late style as a problematic category in his chapter "'All Becomes Strange': Modernity and the Invention of Late Style," in *Late Style and Its Discontents*. I am grateful to him for making it available to me before publication.

beyond high literary art and certainly beyond notions of genius, and beyond the biographical coordinates of old age, to consider lateness an “epochal phenomenon” (SI, 279). Moreover, as a category lateness should be understood in relation to notions of belatedness, *Nachträglichkeit* (deferred action, retroactivity), and “afterness,” for example, and these should in turn be seen within the context of philosophies of being, time, and speed.

About Time: Speed and Chronology in the Twentieth Century

Ever since Paul Virilio coined the term *dromology* (the study of speed in relation to politics) in 1977, searching for the meaning of ever speedier change and the possibilities of resistance to it has become a progressively more urgent concern in social thought, philosophy, and culture more generally.²⁵ The twentieth century has been widely diagnosed as the age of speed. It has been defined as a time of unremitting, forward-looking momentum driven by the dominant institutionalized understanding of modernity: the conquest of nature by mechanization, the belief in open-ended progress, the shift from agrarian and rural to industrial, urban experience, and the spread, one might say the triumph, of the capitalist market economy.²⁶ John Tomlinson, in *The Culture of Speed* (2007), sets out this dominant narrative as the one that has “been most successful in shaping the cultural meaning of speed.”²⁷ Arguably, however, the “fast capitalism” of the last thirty years or so, or what Edward Luttwak calls “turbo capitalism” in the age of global connectivity, has led to a further significant shift in this story. In the digital age the symptoms of speed manifest themselves with a ubiquity, force, inevitably, and immediacy unprecedented, indeed unimagined, in the earlier part of the twentieth century, and allied by some with postmodernity.²⁸ But Tomlinson also sketches a second,

25. Paul Virilio, *Speed and Politics*, trans. Marc Polizzotti (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2006); Virilio, *Negative Horizon: An Essay in Dromoscopy*, trans. Michael Degener (London: Continuum, 2005). See also Mark Currie’s stimulating volume *About Time: Narrative, Fiction, and the Philosophy of Time* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007).

26. Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880–1918* (1983; repr. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

27. John Tomlinson, *The Culture of Speed: The Coming of Immediacy* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2007), 9. Hereafter cited as CS.

28. *Fast Capitalism* is the name of an online journal (www.fastcapitalism.com) also mentioned by Tomlinson, CS, 81. See also Edward Luttwak, *Turbo-Capitalism: Winners and Losers in the Global Economy* (New York: HarperCollins, 1999). Will Hutton and Anthony Giddens offer an analysis in their edited work *On the Edge: Living with Global Capitalism* (London: Cape, 2000), esp. 1–51. On the shifting perception of time within our own experience, see Helga Nowotny, *Time: The Modern and Postmodern Experience* (Cambridge: Polity, 1994), first published as *Eigenzeit: Entstehung und Strukturierung eines Zeitgefühls* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989).

subordinate narrative that he argues interferes with that first layer of interpretation. Here what he calls “unruly time” undermines the discipline and regulation of the first story in favor of the risks, dangers, and sensual immediacy of a discourse constantly threatened by the collapse into violence and chaos (CS, 9). As is clear, both approaches stress the corrosive effects of compressed time on culture. Some of these are usefully set out in their historical context by Benjamin Noys as so many “malign velocities” that condition our accelerating culture but also its radical and explosive response, “accelerationism.”²⁹ But finally, almost as an afterword to his project, Tomlinson sets out to “find virtue in speed” and projects a third understanding based on William Connolly’s *Neuropolitics* (2002).³⁰ Here the dangers of acceleration are acknowledged, but they are countered by the “vicious associations” of various revisionist forms of “deceleration”: that is, for example, nostalgia for “long slow time,” on the one hand, or those versions of localism or communitarianism, on the other, that fail to address the larger social forces acting on the individual and culture more broadly (CS, 157). Pitched against the culture of immediacy that characterizes our present, Tomlinson then proposes an existential “rebalancing”:

The promise of the narrative of mechanical speed was order and progress. The attractions of immediacy are lightly achieved comforts and satisfactions. But neither of these can deliver existential fulfilment or security in the face of the temporally compressed contingencies of contemporary acceleration. Virtue to be found in speed is quite different: it is to apply effort to become nimble and graceful life-performers. The goal is balance. The reward is poise. (159)

Tomlinson’s proposal chimes with other accounts of potential responses to modernity; his “nimble and graceful life-performers” suggest nothing so much as the fascination with a Nietzschean *Lebenskünstler* in the early twentieth century at one extreme, or the highly influential notion of a “liquid modernity” discussed by Zygmunt Bauman, for example, at the other.³¹ Notwithstanding his ambivalence in the face of various facets of deceleration, however, Tomlinson’s advocacy of poise appears fragile in the context of the all-encompassing “immediacy” he diagnoses at such length. His espousal of

29. Benjamin Noys, *Malign Velocities: Acceleration and Capitalism* (Winchester: Zero, 2014). For an introduction to accelerationism, see Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian, eds., *#Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader* (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2014).

30. William Connolly, *Neuropolitics: Thinking, Culture, Speed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

31. Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000).

undefined “slow zones” built into cultural institutional practices (CS, 157) lacks traction in and of itself but also returns responsibility for managing time to the private sphere, caught so successfully in the German term *Eigenzeit* (lit. a time of its own, but also the scientific term for “proper time” in physics). While it might be argued that any attempt to negotiate time must start with the individual, such a vision of nimble gracefulness and inner poise fights shy of articulating a robust temporal politics. For one: it does nothing to intervene in the age; for another, critically, it does not suggest a way to alleviate the position of the forcibly decelerated victims of modernization, those who have not kept pace and have fallen out of time.

For all that Tomlinson’s is simply one of many important analyses over the last two decades or so, his conclusions have been echoed in different contexts (from economics to information technology, philosophy, and culture), and certain aspects of his account have found broad consensus. According to Hartmut Rosa’s highly influential discussions of speed, for example, we live in a world in which the “acceleration compulsion” at a global level has compromised all. Rosa outlines three separate forms of acceleration that each propel the others in a circuit. Technical acceleration feeds into the acceleration of social change, which in turn accelerates the pace of our lives, which creates a demand for ever-increasing technical acceleration. But the increasing speed of technical innovation, societal change, and the pace of life has not, he argues, thrust us forward into history; rather, it has destroyed chronology. Rosa invokes the idea of a “frenetic standstill” (*rasender Stillstand*), wherein “nothing remains the way it is while at the same time *nothing essentially changes*,” a state he sees as coterminous with the end of times.³² The continuity of past, present, and future has been sundered in such a way that autonomous spaces of organization have been transformed into “static space of fatalistic standstill” (SA, 296). This pathological circuit of repetition follows Friedrich Nietzsche in suggesting an “eternal return of the same”: “Here the return of the ever same, the ‘timeliness of time’ of what is at once eternal and ephemeral . . . is hidden behind the rapid turnover of episodes” (296). The result is a breakdown in the ability to ascribe meaning.

32. Hartmut Rosa, *Beschleunigung: Die Veränderung der Zeitstrukturen in der Moderne* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2005). See also Rosa, *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity*, trans. Jonathan Trejo-Matthys (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), esp. “Conclusion: Frenetic Standstill? The End of History,” 299–322; Klaus M. Kodalle and Hartmut Rosa, eds., *Rasender Stillstand: Beschleunigung des Wirklichkeitswandels; Konsequenzen und Grenzen* (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2008). Rosa’s *Social Acceleration* is hereafter cited as SA. Many of the most frequently discussed documents in the debates are usefully collected in English in Hartmut Rosa and William E. Scheuerman, eds., *High Speed Society: Social Acceleration, Power, and Modernity* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009).

This vast field cannot be fully analyzed here.³³ However, one might read this state of “frenetic standstill” alongside Tomlinson’s “immediacy,” the social theorist Manuel Castells’s “timeless time,” or Franco Bifo Berardi’s “slow cancellation of the future,” as one of the most significant reimaginings of the consequences of acceleration for lived time.³⁴ Most recently, Jonathan Crary, in an essay on sleep, has posited the constant continuing of our 24/7 society as a “time of indifference,” a kind of interminable nontime, which is the ultimate dystopian expression of late capitalism.³⁵

Common in these otherwise disparate works is the acknowledgment that chronology has been fundamentally disrupted in a way that has led to instability and disproportion in the relationship between past, present, and future. Reinhart Koselleck, for example, has set out the consequences for our perception of historical time: the space of experience and the horizon of the future become incongruous.³⁶ Hermann Lübbe has coined the idea of a “contraction of the present” (*Gegenwartsschrumpfung*), in which the speed of innovation means that we can neither look back without seeing a world both outdated and alien to our present experience nor look forward to a future in which we can infer our living conditions beyond a drastically shortened number of years.³⁷ The result is a shrunken moment of now-time that is inevitably, if perversely, valorized over and above what might have once been thought of as an organic historical continuity.

In her 2013 *Ist die Zeit aus den Fugen?* Aleida Assmann explores the consequences of such a shift in thinking, but points out that while concepts of future are indeed diminished in contemporary thinking, the past (unexpectedly, perhaps) has gained a new importance: “Alongside the fading of the future we are today experiencing yet another anomaly in our familiar understanding of time, and that is a return of the past in a form never before

33. I have benefited from discussions with colleagues at colloquiums in Warwick and Constance: “Faster than Light: Experience, Identity, and Memory in the Age of Acceleration” (2013) and “The Longing for Time: Ästhetische Eigenzeit in Contemporary Film, Literature and Art” (2014).

34. See Manuel Castells’s seminal work *The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture*, 3 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996–98). Franco Bifo Berardi develops his idea of the slow cancellation of the future in *After the Future*, ed. Gary Genosko and Nicholas Thoburn (Edinburgh: AK Books, 2011), 18, 19.

35. Jonathan Crary, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (London: Verso, 2013), 9. Ivor Southwood’s provocative *Non-stop Inertia* (Winchester: Zero, 2011) reaches a similar conclusion from a different premise.

36. Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985).

37. Hermann Lübbe, *Im Zug der Zeit: Verkürzter Aufenthalt in der Gegenwart* (Berlin: Springer, 1992). In English, see Lübbe, “The Contraction of the Present,” in Rosa and Scheuerman, *High Speed Society*, 159–78.

experienced.”³⁸ Her argument reinvigorates the Janus-faced apprehension of the modern, familiar above all from Walter Benjamin and figured most forcefully in his famous “Angel of History” in his “Ninth Thesis on the Philosophy of History.”³⁹ In Assmann’s account, episodes from history, especially traumatic episodes, that we believed safely done with have come back to haunt us in an unprecedented way. Her fascinating volume attempts to address the effects of this asymmetry of “the too much past and too little future” conundrum on our society. It leads inevitably to a model of a haunted present, signaled explicitly in the title of her volume (taken from *Hamlet*). Most recently, the cultural critic Mark Fisher’s *Ghosts of My Life* (2014) similarly opposes a terrain of “lost futures” to the backward-looking “hauntology,” which he sees as fundamental to an understanding of contemporary music (hauntology is a kind of electronic music) as well as symptomatic of contemporary culture.⁴⁰

However, it is worth setting these accounts alongside those of Andreas Huyssen, who, in *Twilight Memories* (1995) and *Present Pasts* (2003), tackles both the great paradox of late capitalism’s cultural amnesia and the ubiquitous “memory boom.”

One of the most surprising cultural and political phenomena of recent years has been the emergence of memory as a key concern in Western societies, a turning toward the past that stands in stark contrast to the privileging of the future so characteristic of earlier decades of twentieth-century modernity. From the early twentieth century’s apocalyptic myths of radical breakthrough and the emergence of the “new man” in Europe via the murderous phantasms of racial or class purification in National Socialism and Stalinism to the post–World War II American paradigm of modernization, modernist culture was energized by what one might call “present futures.” Since the 1980s, it seems, the focus has shifted from present futures to present pasts, and this shift in the experience and sensibility of time needs to be explained historically and phenomenologically.⁴¹

38. Aleida Assmann, *Ist die Zeit aus den Fugen? Aufstieg und Fall des Zeitregimes der Moderne* (Munich: Hanser, 2013), 13.

39. Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969), 25–78.

40. Mark Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology, and Lost Futures* (Winchester: Zero, 2014). Hereafter cited as *G*.

41. Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Huyssen, “Present Pasts: Media, Politics, Amnesia,” *Public Culture* 12, no. 1 (2000): 21, repr. in *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 11. Huyssen’s *Present Pasts* is hereafter cited as *PP*.

Examining the musealization of the past as one of several contemporary strategies to draw it into the present, Huyssen sets out how these concerns speak to a fin de siècle sensibility and a more deep-rooted and pervasive “culture of memory” (PP, 15). The paradoxical presence of the past he sees as comprehensible precisely in light of the accentuation of the speed of change in modern society: “Memory and musealization together are called upon to provide a bulwark against obsolescence and disappearance, to counter our deep anxiety about the speed of change and the ever shrinking horizons of time and space” (23).

The current transformations of the temporal imaginary brought on by virtual space and time may highlight the enabling dimension of memory culture. . . . The intense memory practices we witness in so many different parts of the world today articulate a fundamental crisis of an earlier structure of temporality that marked the age of high modernity, with its trust in progress and development, with its celebration of the new as utopian, as radically and irreducibly other, and with its unshaken belief in some telos of history. (26–27)

But this is a fraught struggle in which the hyperacceleration of a digital and global present also threatens the very existence of the cultural productions that seek to diagnose it. They are engulfed in the frenetic recycling and offer no vantage point with which to resist. Here is the counterpoint to the contracted present set out by Lübbe: an omnivorous present, as it were, in which past and future collapse. In the search for zones of strategic deceleration Rosa, in common with many of the commentators discussed here, does not discern in culture a way out. All is accommodated by hypercapitalism. However, there are different ways to view this. Byung-Chul Han, in *Der Duft der Zeit* (2009), contends:

The crisis in time that exists today is not acceleration. The age of acceleration is already past. What we are experiencing at the moment as acceleration is in fact simply one of the symptoms of temporal dissipation. The feeling that life is accelerating is in reality the sense of a time that is hopelessly adrift. . . . The de-synchrony is not the result of an enforced regime of acceleration. Rather this de-synchronization is above all the atomization of time. Nothing can *contain* [verhält] time.⁴²

He argues (in a persuasive thesis set explicitly against Rosa) that the atomization of life entails an atomization of identity, which in turn leads to the inability

42. Byung-Chul Han, *Der Duft der Zeit: Ein philosophischer Essay zur Kunst des Verweilens* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2009), 1.

to entertain endings, the inability to age, and the inability to die. For him, we need a reinvention of “felt time,” explicitly linked with “Dauer” (or *longue durée*), and he locates the possible motor for this in a revitalized *vita contemplativa*. Like most philosophers, Han is not interested in culture as a possible answer. Instead, he sees in the end of narrative, the end of history (he elides the two), the possibility of a life time / time of life without theology and without telos. Yet, ironically enough, he marshals examples from Friedrich Hölderlin, Peter Handke, Rainer Maria Rilke, and old Chinese masters among others both to diagnose the problem and to offer a solution.⁴³

Notwithstanding these approaches, it is surely not so far-fetched to suggest that culture might offer some kind of redress to, or check on, acceleration in various ways. It can, for example, act as a vital decelerant and can also create the precondition for duration, which permits conditions for action that are sufficiently stable for us to make sense of the changes around us and, significantly, to participate in them. In demanding attention of and by itself, it can remove us from the present moment and draw attention to chronologies lost. And it can offer models of intervention. Andrea Köhler, in *Die geschenkte Zeit* (lit. *Wasted Time*, 2011), contends that to offset the permanently increasing tempo of our lives, we introduce our various “pockets of slowness” (*unsere Langsamkeiten*) of different kinds.⁴⁴ Attempts to document the manifestations of slowness in its various forms—from Fritz Reheis’s best seller exploring the “creativity of slowness” to Sten Nadolny’s influential “discovery of slowness” or the influential slow food movement—together might be thought to constitute a form of cultural resistance, even an oppositional ideology.⁴⁵ But slowness is only one focus, and strategies of potential deceleration take various forms. Köhler’s own particular interest, with a debt to Roland Barthes, for example, is “waiting,” though one could do a typology of these kinds of “pockets of slowness,” which might include “tiredness,” “illness,” “transcendence,” “phantomology,” and “lateness.” Although they are all fascinating and most probably linked, and deserve proper analysis in their own right, the present

43. A similar move characterizes the influential analysis by John Gray, *The Silence of Animals: On Progress and Other Modern Myths* (London: Lane, 2013), in which Gray espouses an end-of-history scenario characterized by a Nietzschean “godless mysticism” as an antidote to progress but bases his analysis on a rich repertoire of modern literature, precisely rooted in time.

44. Andrea Köhler, *Die geschenkte Zeit: Über das Warten* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 2007), 79; *The Waiting Game: An Essay on the Gift of Time*, trans. Michael Eskin (New York: Upper Westside Philosophers Press, 2012), 81.

45. Fritz Reheis, *Die Kreativität der Langsamkeit: Neuer Wohlstand durch Entschleunigung* (Darmstadt: Primus, 1988); a summary in English appeared in *Speed*, January 2009, www.detecon-dmr.com/en/article/the-creativity-of-slowness_2009_03_18. See also Sten Nadolny, *Die Entdeckung der Langsamkeit* (Munich: Piper, 1987). For a discussion of slowness, see Tomlinson, *CS*, 146–54.

issue focuses on the last of these, “lateness,” about which the commentators in the debates about time have, so far, been remarkably silent.

Figuring Lateness in Modern German Culture

This special issue seeks to address some of the questions outlined above with particular reference to German culture in the twentieth century and beyond. In some senses, lateness can be seen as a particularly German preoccupation. Indeed, it is an issue in German culture in a way that is largely absent in, and certainly different from, the English-language tradition. This has its particular causes rooted in Germany’s history. First, notwithstanding the fact that it can call on a long and rich past in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Germany as a nation is itself relatively young. What is more, the peculiarly delayed nature of its coming to nationhood has led some to consider it the very emblem of the “belated nation,” the title of Helmuth Plessner’s influential work of 1959.⁴⁶ On the other hand, the well-documented rapid societal aging in Germany has arguably also meant that Germany as a nation has extrapolated its sense of personal old age into a larger feeling of itself as an “old Country,” coming to regard itself even as an “overly old society” (*überalterte Gesellschaft*) and, in economic terms, as Taberner argues, has increasingly compared itself unfavorably with the supposed dynamism of the growing economies, above all China (*Aging and Old-Age Style*, 200).

Second, and more important, perhaps, that German history has been created by a series of dramatic historical caesuras, repeated revolution, war, division, and unification has forged a powerful sense of the individual’s relation to the larger historical moment, but also a powerful cohort effect. The result is that German discourse is dominated by very specific master narratives about generational experience in a way that, for example, American or British sensibilities are not. Karl Mannheim’s reflections on the relationship between generation and historical experience have come to shape critical reflection on German culture in a marked manner.⁴⁷ In this way, reflecting on the collective experience of a generation also becomes a way to come to terms with a particular historical experience. The most important of these, of course, is World War II and the Holocaust.

The genealogy of discourse on late style is founded on German thinking, from the elevation of Goethe as a normative model of serene late style to the

46. Helmuth Plessner, *Die verspätete Nation* (1959; repr. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2001).

47. Karl Mannheim, “The Problem of Generations,” trans. Edith Schwarzschild and Paul Kecskemeti, in *From Karl Mannheim*, ed. Kurt H. Wolff, 2nd ed. (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1993), 351–98.

rethinking of the category during the early twentieth century as part of the modernist project (by thinkers as diverse as Adorno, Benn, Ernst Bloch, Albert Erich Brinckmann, Broch, Neumann, Georg Simmel, and Oswald Spengler). As McMullan points out, “If German Romanticism was responsible for the invention of late style, then German modernism was in a sense responsible for its reinvention” (*SI*, 277). However, after 1945 the reprise of a serious interest in lateness (peaking in the 1950s and 1960s) was also driven predominantly by German philosophy and scholarship. What is more, Painter astutely observes that an interest in lateness served a special function at this time. It helped legitimize the project of retrieving an artistic heritage from Nazism more plausible: the emphasis on the human and the personal offering an alternative access to the pernicious influence of fascism on the German legacy (*LT*, 4).

In this spirit Taberner’s 2013 study of Martin Walser, Günter Grass, Ruth Klüger, and Christa Wolf under the auspices of aging is explicitly a study of a particular generation implicated in fascism (the so-called Flakhelfer generation, born in the late 1920s). With advancing years comes the latest, in some cases the last, stage of a prolonged reckoning with the legacy of the Nazi past.⁴⁸ This decisive historical moment has fostered its own preoccupation with lateness, with several writers regarding their writing as always and already late (e.g., W. G. Sebald, Michael Hamburger, and Michael Krüger): that is, always coming after, and inflected by, the Holocaust. After 1989 there has been a renewed concern with this trope (e.g., Günter Grass, Walser, and Peter Rühmkorf): the biographical coordinates of some of the major writers coinciding with an epochal caesura that has seen a conscious writing after the end of history.

A similar point, however, may be made about the continuing relevance of old age and lateness as a category in contemporary culture conditioned by the experience of the end of the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Work by prominent writers such as Heiner Müller, Volker Braun, and Christa Wolf has returned repeatedly to the collapse of the state and the end of history implied in its demise. With that rupture has come a widely documented *Sinnkrise* (crisis of meaning) and the sense of the catastrophic ending of the modernist project.⁴⁹

48. Despite his subtitle, *The Mannerism of a Late Period*, Taberner offers a study of old age as the catalyst for different kinds of life review—Grass as self-monumentalizing, Wolf (and Klüger) as self-healing, and Walser as self-transcendent—in which the aesthetic repercussions of a performance of lateness are less important.

49. See Wolfgang Emmerich, “The GDR and Its Literature: An Overview,” in *Re-reading East Germany: The Literature and Film of the GDR*, ed. Karen Leeder (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

The end of Braun's poem "Lagerfeld" famously projects the sense of uncontrolled descent into a cul-de-sac of historical aftermath (late capitalism) against a classical backdrop.

In der Wegwerfgesellschaft
 Das Stadion voll letzter Schreie Ideen
 Roms letzte Epoche des Unernsts
 Sehn Sie nun das Finale ICH ODER ICH
 Salute, Barbaren

[In the Throwaway Society
 The arena full of the last screams Ideas
 Rome's last era, unseriousness
 Now watch the finale ME OR ME
 Greetings, barbarians]⁵⁰

Indeed, the widespread motif of various kinds of *revenants* (specters, doppelgängers, zombies, vampires, and the undead) in recent work from the Berlin Republic speaks to a society looking over its shoulder and chronically haunted by its multilayered pasts.⁵¹ As Jacques Derrida points out, after all, the specter is the ultimate "figure of repetition," and it is not hard to see these shapes in the work of Wolf, Müller, Braun, and many others as a crisis of coming after.⁵² As Heiner Müller puts it: "The dead is not dead in history."⁵³ In the context of post-1989 Germany, this manifests itself in a constant conjuring of history, which owes much to the need to reckon with the fascist past and is compounded by the second truncated past of the GDR, but it also speaks to a wider apprehension of end times.⁵⁴

50. Volker Braun, *Tumulus* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1999), 39–41. Translation taken from Braun, *Rubble Flora: Selected Poems*, trans. David Constantine and Karen Leeder (Chicago: Seagull, 2014), 75.

51. Karen Leeder, "'After the Massacre of Illusions': Specters of the GDR in the Work of Volker Braun," in "Transformations of German Cultural Identity, 1989–2009," ed. Anne Fuchs and Kathleen James Chakraborty, special issue, *New German Critique*, no. 116 (2012): 103–18; Catherine Smale, *Phantom Images: The Figure of the Ghost in the Works of Christa Wolf and Irina Liebmann* (London: MHRA, 2013).

52. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), xvii–xviii.

53. "Ein Gespräch zwischen Wolfgang Heise und Heiner Müller," in Heiner Müller, *Gesammelte Irrtümer: Interviews und Gespräche*, 3 vols. (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag der Autoren, 1986–94), 2:64.

54. Karen Leeder, "Dances of Death: A Last Literature from the GDR," in *Twenty Years On: Competing Memories of the GDR in Post-unification German Culture*, ed. Renate Rechten and Dennis Tate (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2011), 187–202.

This has various consequences that are acute in those artists who have suffered (sometimes a second) epochal crisis, but also moves beyond this particular crisis and blends into a larger feeling of end times. Former GDR author Günter de Bruyn, born in 1926 and thus of the same generation as Wolf, Müller, Braun, and the others mentioned already, is one of many writers whose autobiographically inspired work has been dedicated to chronicling the aging process as one of increasing redundancy and obsolescence. In his *Unzeitgemäßes: Betrachtungen über Vergangenheit und Gegenwart* (*Untimely Reflections: Observations on Past and Present*, 2000), he contends, with a nod to Nietzsche, that “growing older also means to no longer feel yourself to be the child of the age” (see Anne Fuchs’s contribution in this issue).⁵⁵ Likewise, Monika Maron’s post-1989 work—for example, *Animal Triste* (1996) or *Endmoränen* (*End Moraines*, 2002)—obsessively charts the feeling of waste and superfluity in the debilitating emptiness of the present. But such feelings are not limited to those who grew up in the GDR. I have discussed elsewhere the self-stylization as “dinosaur,” “yesterday’s man,” or “last Mohican” that Grass wears as a veritable badge of pride and can be understood as part of his overall project of retrospective self-monumentalization.⁵⁶

Discussing the duty to defend democratic debate during the time of unification, Grass argues that “only three elderly gents named Jens, Habermas, and Grass” were left holding the baton: “Three interchangeable names, sometimes listed in one order and sometimes in another. The last Mohicans. Three OAP Musketeers. Three dinosaurs, who know no other. Three ‘sticks in the mud,’ that’s what they wrote. Of course, I understand that the word *engagement* has a whiff of the old about it, all too reminiscent of mothballs.”⁵⁷ More recently, as part of a different trio in Leipzig in 2005, “The Three Tenors of Belletristik,” Grass, Rühmkorf, and Hans Magnus Enzensberger, also staged themselves as grand old men.⁵⁸ This rather whimsical portrait belies an acute anxiety often associated with lateness. But it also suggests that with the pass-

55. Günter de Bruyn, *Unzeitgemäßes: Betrachtungen über Vergangenheit und Gegenwart* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2001), 71.

56. Karen Leeder, “‘Last Dances’: Reading Grass through Adorno and Said,” in *Changing the Nation: Günter Grass in International Perspective*, ed. Rebecca Braun and Frank Brunssen (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2008), 49–66.

57. Günter Grass, “Was heißt heute Engagement? Dankrede zum Fritz-Bauer-Preis,” *Die Zeit*, April 29, 1998, feuilleton, 40.

58. Volker Weidermann, “Lyrik-Gipfeltreffen: Hans Magnus, ich hatte Sehnsucht nach dir,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, April 16, 2005. The reading was televised and broadcast by NDR on May 9, 2007. See www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/buecher/rezensionen/belletristik/literatur-lyrik-gipfeltreffen-hans-magnus-ich-hatte-sehnsucht-nach-dir-1230726.html.

ing of a generation, a certain understanding of political and cultural commitment will also be eclipsed. Taberner, who submits Grass's old-age writing to comprehensive scrutiny, concludes that Grass may effectively have talked himself out of "'late' relevance" despite himself: the idiosyncrasy of his very project in fact emphasizing its redundancy (*Aging and Old-Age Style*, 203).

But there is a larger point here, which has something to do with the dominance of this particular generation and their concerns for so many years in Germany. The German cultural scene has been shaped by this generation of "1945ers" and their struggle to deal with an existential lateness relating principally to the Nazi period, but also now compounded by the end of the GDR. To be sure, their project can also be understood on a larger scale as coming to terms with "a barbaric expression of the broader deformation of modernity" (*Aging and Old-Age Style*, 197). But, as Taberner points out, "Germany's aging authors may be writing at a point when German history is finally becoming just that—truly historical" (18). Caught up in the accelerating process of normalization, the past that defined Germany for so long, and those concerned primarily with it, threaten to become anachronistic. Taberner cannily locates the particular old-age writing he is interested in on a threshold between the "post-war and the post-postwar" (19, 211) and understands the writers as partaking of "a generalized condition of postness" from the particular starting point of a normalized Germany: "being definitively post-religion, post-reason, post-Holocaust, post-industrial, postmodern, post-ideological and so forth" (199–200).

Nevertheless, beyond the particularly German dimension of this question, as suggested here, it cannot be denied that the modern Western culture more broadly is implicated in a sense of "end times"—thinking that transcends national distinctions. On one level, as I have argued throughout, this gestures toward modernism's "sense of an ending," to borrow Frank Kermode's resonant title, which has marked much cultural production in the wake of the millennium.⁵⁹ This has been diagnosed by several commentators in different figures—from the fairy to the ghost or the angel—and perhaps most persuasively in the ruin.⁶⁰ But, at another level, it also resonates with philosophical

59. Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction with a New Epilogue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), see esp. "Epilogue," written with an eye to the millennium, 181–97.

60. Peter Fritzsche, *Stranded in the Present: Modern Time and the Melancholy of History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); Anne Fuchs, *Phantoms of War in Contemporary German Literature, Films, and Discourse: The Politics of Memory* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Julia Hell and Andreas Schönle, eds., *Ruins of Modernity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

interventions that have sought to locate society in a state of terminal decline, such as Slavoj Žižek's *Living in the End Times*, for example, or have tried to speculate with, even reinvent, futures from a Marxist perspective, amid the bric-a-brac of the present, such as Fredric Jameson's *Archaeologies of the Future* (2005).⁶¹ Similarly, the widespread representation of postapocalyptic scenarios in art and popular culture lends force to this kind of terminal thinking, which in its latest manifestation (of postmemory) adds another to Taberner's lists of "generalized posts" and projects lateness into a radical "aftermath," beyond time (see also Kirstin Gwyer's contribution in this issue).⁶²

It might also, however, be thought to invoke a more complex sense of "coming after or following," such as that set out by Gerhard Richter in his 2011 volume, which documents in modern philosophy what he calls "a particular figure of modernity, that of following, coming after, having survived, outlived, or succeeded something or someone: what in broad terms I wish to call *afterness*."⁶³ The experience and thinking of "afterness," as Richter explores it, in this exhilarating volume, invokes an inevitable sense of hauntedness, a matter, after Derrida, of the ghostly other that will not stay buried, but also the responsibility that intervention imposes on us, if we let it, "to learn to inherit a legacy that is at odds with itself" (A, 15). This in turn provokes the question of how we speak with and figure such ghosts.

Said conceived of the late artist as "a figure of lateness itself, a scandalous, even catastrophic commentator on the present" (*OLS*, 14). But, more broadly, we might wish to catalog the figures and tropes produced by this rhetoric of endings, and become aware of the technologies of lateness that manifest themselves in various aesthetic forms. Said's own disconsolate aesthetic of intransigence and "deliberately unproductive productiveness" (17) has its part to play. But one might also look elsewhere for various "aesthetics of lateness": from the recycling of contemporary music or documentary material to the poetics of "allusion" so brilliantly analyzed by Christopher Ricks; narratives of amnesia, prolixity, and digression; works of art that conjure or reenact *longue durée* or self-conscious return, on the one hand, or what I have called a "spectral aesthetic" consisting of intertextuality, lacunae, deferral,

61. Slavoj Žižek, *Living in the End Times* (London: Verso, 2010); Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London: Verso, 2005).

62. James Berger, *After the End: Representations of Post-apocalypse* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

63. Gerhard Richter, *Afterness: Figures of Following in Modern Thought and Aesthetics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 2. Hereafter cited as A.

undecidability, doubling, and repetition, on the other; or finally pastiche, perhaps the archtrope of lateness.⁶⁴

This special issue can offer only soundings, of course; nevertheless it attempts, in this spirit, to figure aspects of lateness in the twentieth century and beyond by addressing literature, music, philosophy, photography, film, and architecture and by spanning the fractured discourses of lateness in modernity up to the radical differentiation of time in a digitalized high-speed postmodernity.⁶⁵ Fuchs opens the issue with a wide-ranging and provocative overview of discourses of acceleration and speed in the twentieth century that demonstrates how lateness is intrinsically linked to the rise of bourgeois individualism and is a symptom of modern life (traffic, the metropolis, media, and capital). As the flip side of acceleration, lateness and slowness, she argues, disrupt the relentless logic of the modernizing project by critiquing the harnessing of attention that is a hallmark of modernity's high-speed society. She offers three readings of lateness—the moral interpretation of lateness as a stigma, the psychic view of lateness as a condition of perception, and the psychoanalytic interpretation, which turns lateness into a generative principle of cultural change. If Fuchs concentrates on subjectivities of lateness, Peter Thompson takes the possibilities of “latency” discussed by Fuchs out of the psychoanalytic milieu and explores the issue of lateness in the philosophical context of the early twentieth century. In examining Martin Heidegger's and Bloch's notions of “becoming,” lateness is shown to be a fraught category that exists only in a cyclical form, if at all, in that any apprehension of lateness is shown simultaneously to comprehend beginnings. The dynamic nonsimultaneity Bloch invokes is shown to point forward to contemporary theories of time addressed by theorists such as Jameson or Žižek, but also to challenge dystopian scenarios of “late” capitalism by reminding us of the “principle of hope.”

Still in the first half of the century, but moving to the realm of musicology, Joy Calico's contribution picks up the central but underresearched area of

64. For a stimulating account of recycling, especially in music, see Fisher, *G*. On allusion, see Christopher Ricks, *Allusion to the Poets* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); and Richard Dyer, *Pastiche*, new ed. (London: Routledge, 2006). See also Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991). Hereafter cited as *P*.

65. It fails adequately to explore the gendering of age and lateness, though this has been the subject of a growing body of recent literature: see esp. Silvia Bovenschen, *Älter werden: Notizen* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2008); Margarete Mitscherlich, *Die Radikalität des Alters: Einsichten einer Psychoanalytikerin* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2010); Kathleen Woodward, *Figuring Age: Women, Bodies, Generations* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999); Margaret Morganroth Gullette, *Aged by Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); and Lynne Segal, *Out of Time: The Pleasure and Perils of Ageing* (London: Verso, 2013).

exile as a figure of “old-age style” in the life and works of Arnold Schoenberg. She also points beyond conventional approaches to offer a reading of disability as a manifestation of lateness. There has been much research on impairment, old age, and creativity along with attempts to recuperate the various symptoms—amnesia, for example—as aesthetically productive. Calico does not follow this tack exactly, but reinterprets Schoenberg’s diatonic serialism as a kind of musical bilingualism, an attempt to work simultaneously, contrapuntally, in two languages that implies a constructed and highly strategic late aesthetic forged out of exile and disability in a particular time and place.

Shifting to the realm of film and photography, George Kouvaros foregrounds the idea of belatedness in Wim Wenders with reference to the image. Using the idea of looking at something “as if it were for the last time,” he sets out how the “allure of photography” aligns our existence with the existence of things that have passed while imbuing these things “with an afterlife that calls us to account as temporal beings.” What is more, he highlights how photography simultaneously functions as a medium with its own aesthetic demands, a way to reflect on the nature of cinema and, most challenging of all, a form of temporal experience characterized by a sense of things passing. Here he raises the question of the conservative function of photography and film. They are always late, he points out, premised on the extinction of a moment, but uniquely among the arts, they also preserve and repeat this unrepeatable moment. Kouvaros also confronts the issue of a more generalized “afterness,” a kind of anxiety of influence (Bloom) that is inherent in this situation and, one might argue, in all late endeavors.

In his discussion Taberner also analyzes the “sense of things passing” by interrogating the “late style” of a major postwar author: Martin Walser. If, in *Aging and Old-Age Style*, Taberner examines Walser under the sign of “self-transcendence,” here, examining a group of three novels published between 2004 and 2008, his conclusions focus on the performance of a deviant version of old age that subverts convention in the spirit of “untimeliness.” Walser’s prolixity, digression, distraction, and wayward self-revision are understood in light of Said’s theories of late style to be a deliberately offensive enactment of old age. In this they can be recouped as a considered intervention, a performed anachronism that, as with certain aesthetic strategies employed by older artists, can be rethought as intentionally subversive.

It is difficult to think of time without relating it simultaneously to place, and Simon Ward offers a reading of lateness within the urban topography of Berlin as a “late” city. Works by Christian Boltanski, Shimon Attie, Arwed Messmer, and Lars Ramberg, he argues, interrogate the dynamics of urban

memory, viewing acts of memory as technologies in themselves, as citation, tribute, or pastiche. Theoretical reflection on urban spaces by Rem Koolhaas, Maurice Halbwachs, and Jean Baudrillard allows Ward to situate urban and posturban memory within the contested field of memory studies, between communicative, collective, and cultural memory. If Ward is concerned to trace ways of “remembering well,” Gwyer closes the issue by opening the field “beyond lateness” in the way it has been understood up until now in the issue. Situating her discussion in the radical aftermath of postmemory, where lateness is no longer a position of ending but one beyond living memory, she explores the notion that lateness has become less a cultural affliction than a privileged situation to assess the past and offer a form of consolation. Drawing on James Berger, Eva Hoffmann, and Marianne Hirsch, Gwyer examines the territory of a postcatastrophic “afterwardness” in the light of trauma theory. The family or generational novel written after and in response to Germany’s National Socialist past is, as Gwyer argues, “a ‘late’ genre par excellence” in that belatedness is necessarily part and parcel of its existence and that it is concerned less with the historical events themselves than with the secondary effects they have on those inheriting them. This territory then provides the backdrop to an examination of the belated manifestations of trauma that become legible only after the fact and the opportunity to interrogate the potentially questionable “authority” of lateness. While acknowledging the value of this phenomenon, Gwyer detects a shift in focus, at a critical as well as a popular level, from the experience of trauma and latency in the first generation to the belatedness and traumatic legacy in later generations, especially the third. Her study of recent work by Doron Rabinovici and Marcel Beyer reveals that it is precisely where such approaches are fully implicated in the past that they actually reveal its processes.

Buying Time: Lateness and the Politics of Time

It remains to ask whether this bout of twentieth-century lateness bears particular characteristics that might mark it out from the lateness of previous epochs and the sensibilities and aesthetic strategies invoked. In other words, is the consideration of lateness sketched out here simply part of a larger cycle, associated with a *fin de siècle* sensibility that has been writ large in the face of a millennial ending? This may be true in part. The debates certainly seem to recur with slightly different emphases: from the Platonic category of the “opsimath,” or the thwarted sense of the “epigone,” so widely debated in the nineteenth century, to *fin de siècle* decadence, Sigmund Freud’s theories of deferred action, retroactivity, or *Nachträglichkeit*, Adorno’s post-Marxist

critique of late bourgeois subjectivity, Bloom's post-Freudian anxiety of influence, or the axiomatic lateness of the postmodern.⁶⁶ Taken as a whole, "the feeling that one has been born late provides," as Ben Hutchinson argues, "one of the driving forces of aesthetic modernity."⁶⁷ However, the contributions gathered here suggest that we are also witnessing a fundamental revision of the project of modernity (including its extension and correction in postmodernity) that speaks to an acute and particular sense of crisis and renders lateness a timely consideration. Certainly, as a subject, lateness seems to be generating critical attention in ever-increasing volumes, from philosophy to literary criticism, sociology, and popular culture, fueled, on the one hand, by a demographic shift that places it center stage but, on the other, perhaps also by our experience of so-called late capitalism.

It is true that the politics of time is often eclipsed in discussions of lateness, especially where it is located within the subjectivities of the individual, as it generally is both by those critics who look to Freudian models (especially of traumatic *Nachträglichkeit*) and by those who focus on old-age style. It lies beyond the scope of this introduction to suggest a coherent political interpretation. However, there are suggestive pointers. And if in this issue Fuchs sets out the acceleration that accompanied the beginning of the twentieth century and identifies it with the rise of the bourgeois subject in industrial capitalism, Jameson in a series of remarkably prescient writings beginning in the 1980s examined what he called "late capitalism," ushered in by the end of the bourgeois ego, the shift from industrial to finance capital, and the iterations of the postmodern.

What has lateness as discussed here to do with late capitalism? Jameson explains that the term originated with the Frankfurt School and refers to the form of capitalism that characterized the modernist period and now dominates postmodern culture. If bureaucratic control and the interpenetration of government and big business defined the term for the Frankfurt School, the term has, as Jameson explains, "very different overtones" for the modern age (*P*, xviii). Drawing on the long-wave economic theories of Ernest Mandel's *Late Capitalism* (1978), Jameson locates the economic emergence to the 1950s: "The economic preparation of postmodernism or late capitalism began in the 1950s, after the wartime shortages of consumer goods and spare parts had been made up, and new products and new technologies (not least those of the

66. Dirk Göttsche, *Zeit im Roman: Literarische Zeitreflexion und die Geschichte des Zeitromans im späten 18. und 19. Jahrhundert* (Munich: Fink, 2001); Markus Fauser, *Intertextualität als Poetik des Epigonalen: Immermann-Studien* (Munich: Fink, 1999).

67. Ben Hutchinson, "Afterword," in McMullan and Smiles, *Late Style and Its Discontents*.

media) could be pioneered" (*P*, xx). This prepared the way for the emergence of late capitalist sensibilities during the 1960s, before the 1970s saw the coming together of these two aspects—the economic system and the cultural “structure of feeling”—crystallized in the great shock of the crises of 1971, including the beginning of the end of traditional communism (xx–xxi). In general, Jameson understands “late capitalism” as the pervasive condition of our own age characterized by a new turn, a “strange new landscape” (xxi). Specifically addressing the significance of the qualifier *late* in his title, Jameson explains:

[It] rarely means anything so silly as the ultimate senescence, breakdown, and death of the system as such (a temporal vision that would rather seem to belong to modernism than postmodernism). What “late” generally conveys is rather the sense that something has changed, that things are different, that we have gone through a transformation of the life world which is somehow decisive but incomparable with the older convulsions of modernization and industrialization, less perceptible and dramatic, somehow, but more permanent precisely because more thoroughgoing and all-pervasive. (xxi)

Here the idea of a temporal understanding is downplayed in favor of a structural one in which “*late capitalism* is something like a literal translation of the other expressionism *postmodernism*” (xxi). Indeed, Jameson contends that appropriate synonyms for late capitalism might include “‘multinational capitalism,’ ‘spectacle or image society,’ ‘media capitalism,’ ‘the world system,’ even ‘postmodernism’ itself” (xviii). As is already clear, Jameson is chiefly concerned with the cultural and aesthetic repercussions of this shift.

At the forefront of his dystopian analysis is the pathological rupture of our relationship with history, an acute “waning of historicity” that betokens the passing of the “lived possibility of expressing our relationship to history in some active way” (*P*, 21). In its wake, however, also comes the inability to describe our own present. Notwithstanding “a series of spasmodic and intermittent, but desperate, attempts at recuperation” (x), history is reduced to a series of emptied-out stylizations that can then be commodified and consumed. Our relationship to the past is engaged in the “nostalgia mode,” though Jameson is quick to point out that this is a bowdlerized nostalgia (bereft of the pain of the “properly modernist nostalgia” of yore [18]). Indeed, it might be thought to preclude any psychological nostalgia, since it comes into being only when a coherent sense of time breaks down. It might better be termed a structural or formal nostalgia, what he calls elsewhere “nostalgia deco” (xvii). The key mode is that of anachronism and pastiche: the cannibalization and recycling of past modes as a kind of empty mimicry (17). In such a world of pastiche, we

lose our connection to history, which gets turned into a series of styles and quickly superseded genres, or simulacra: “The new spatial logic of the simulacrum can now be expected to have a momentous effect on what used to be historical time” (18). History can thus be understood only as a repository of genres, styles, and codes ready for commodification. Jameson gives a series of examples: postmodern architecture and its random cannibalization of past modes; “nostalgia films,” with their glossy hyperstylization of the past; the planned obsolescence of modes and forms. Writing of nostalgia films, for example, he sets out how they “restructure the whole issue of pastiche and project it onto a collective and social level, where the desperate attempt to appropriate a missing past is now refracted through the iron law of fashion change and the emergent ideology of the generation” (18–19).

These brief comments suffice to sketch out the direction of Jameson’s thinking and how resonant they are with the concerns described in this issue. But what would it be to reinvest in the temporal aspect of the lateness that Jameson dismisses and how would that relate to the arguments set out here? The importance of Jameson’s analysis of the postmodern condition for the 1990s is difficult to overestimate. The last twenty-five years have only sharpened our perception of the symptoms he described. Indeed, some of those symptoms (formal nostalgia, recycling, cannibalization, etc.) feature in the various articles of this issue as properties defined here of lateness. What is more, his analysis has also proved highly productive for our contemporary moment. Fisher, in *Ghosts of My Life*, for example, uses Jameson as a springboard and detects ubiquitous signs of exhaustion, finitude, deflation of expectations, temporal disjuncture, and formal nostalgia in twenty-first-century popular culture. Observing that the dyschronia we experience ought to feel uncanny, yet does not, he notes the presence of a predominant “retro mania” that neutralizes any “unheimlich charge.” He concludes, “Jameson’s postmodernism—with its tendencies towards retrospection and pastiche—has been naturalized” (G, 14).

But one might also ask whether Jameson’s “late capitalism” has today been intensified, or maybe even superseded, in the late-late or hypercapitalism of the moment. Another way to formulate the question might be to ask whether today’s particular lateness is that of post-postmodernity. The change of gear brought by the digital era, with its instant connectivity, its unmitigated acceleration, its disintegration of old paradigms of consumption and distribution, its commodification of time and even the human genome, and its ever-faster recycling has intensified the dilemma. It also, quite possibly, offers different responses. Fisher, for one, notes anachronism, inertia, “and the sheer persis-

tence of recognisable forms” (G, 6). Be that as it may, the links between some form of capitalism and the temporal pathology we inhabit are evident. And it might be that lateness, now *precisely* as a trope of modernity, can offer a redress. A single example: Andrew Niccol’s dystopian Hollywood parable of 2011, *In Time*, figures time (literally) as the new universal currency. It projects forward to a kind of terminal capitalism and a society in which humans are engineered for obsolescence. They stop aging at twenty-five, but are given a single additional year on the clock and must buy themselves time if they wish to survive for longer. The rich in the Greenwich time zone will live forever, and practice a slow, careful living; those in the ghetto zone live (literally) day to day, learning very early how to run and laboring in the midst of spiraling inflation to earn minutes. Crystallized here we see a universe of pathological temporality, where time is the ultimate commodity. In this film (which incidentally bears all the hallmarks of a formal nostalgia described by Jameson),⁶⁸ lateness acts as a dystopian precondition, but also a revolutionary possibility in a manner not so very different from the replicants in the film *Blade Runner*. Here, however, the rebellion is successful. The poor storm the citadel of time finance and liberate the means of production in a parabolic Marxist recuperation. *In Time* is perhaps oversentimental in its conclusion, though its analysis is striking. It is to be hoped, however, that the possibilities it offers for lateness to be reappropriated as a strategic intervention against precisely such a world can be productive. This special issue can be seen as a contribution in that direction.

68. It was also the subject of a lawsuit for its debt to a 1965 short story (the suit was dropped) and is widely acknowledged to be influenced by the 1975 story “Time Is Money” and the 1987 film *The Price of Life*.

